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ABSTRACT

This module, which may be used as the basis for a workshop or as a special topic unit in adult basic education or English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) courses, focuses on how to evaluate the facts, opinions, and positions on social issues held by family and friends, neighbors, authority figures, and the media. Topics covered include the following: evaluating information resources, distinguishing between fact and opinion; distinguishing collaborating and negotiating; debating issues; working in teams; locating, analyzing, and using resources; and researching online. Basic skills addressed include thinking skills, using resources, interpersonal skills, and using information. The module contains the following: teaching points for the instructor; sample learning activities; a list of 15 resources; a sample lesson plan consisting of objectives, learners and context, room setup, materials needed, tasks to do ahead, media used, and steps for conducting the lesson; role-play materials; and pre- and postassessments. (KC)

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ED 416 355

Tierra de Oportunidad

MODULE 18

Analyzing and Debating Issues

Ed Kissam and Holda Dorsey

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INSTRUCTIONAL AREA
Promoting Community Participation

MODULE 18
Analyzing and Debating Community Issues

Overview

Living in a society where information constantly moves faster and faster, it is not a luxury to analyze the information we receive from family and friends, neighbors, authority figures such as teachers and employers, and from radio, newspapers and television. A problem which immigrants inevitably face in coming to terms with an unfamiliar social environment is how to evaluate the facts, the opinions, and positions on social issues held by people who live around them.

Living in communities which are increasingly diverse -- in language, ethnicity, occupational makeup, and income -- it is also not surprising that we have different opinions on many community issues which affect all of us. Growing numbers of people, both U.S.-born and immigrants faced with a complex range of issues, "turn off" and "tune out". Adult educators, whatever subject areas they are teaching, have a responsibility to inform their students why they should be involved in community issues and how to be effectively involved.

Because there are increasing social tensions and long-standing problems in many of the communities where immigrants live, it is particularly important for them to be aware of what their neighbors, friends, local officials, local businesses, elected representatives, may be thinking or doing about community issues.

The idea that everyone should participate in "civic affairs" is a valid one, but getting involved is neither very attractive nor meaningful unless one knows how to analyze and discuss the issues. It is important to take the time to make one's own decision about what issues to become involved in and what kind of involvement might be personally meaningful. The idea of voting, for example, as the key duty of a citizen in a democracy, cannot be meaningful unless one studies the issues or the ways in which voting might affect one's own well-being or the well-being of one's community. Both immigrant and U.S.-born people, should have a particular interest in analyzing social issues and participating in debate because the resulting decisions will directly affect their lives and the lives of their children.

Immigrants who may not be eligible to vote, either because they are too young, or because they are not citizens, should know that they can still get involved and make a difference. Getting involved -- talking about issues, participating in groups which get together to learn more about issues or to influence other people's perspectives, writing letters, phoning people, working in political campaigns -- is permitted whether or not one is a citizen.

Analyzing issues and debating them is not only part of community life, it is also part of one's personal and work lives. The same analytic and communication skills are used in dealing with issues in each of the life domains. Confronting issues, discussing them, exploring differences of opinion, and trying to resolve those differences are all an increasingly important part of thriving in contemporary life.

Basic Skills Development

This module is oriented toward integrating basic skills in several different domains. Skills development domains addressed in this module include: listening, critical thinking, speaking, teamwork, negotiation, using resources, and problem-solving. Attention to analyzing and debating (i.e. discussing issues from different perspectives) community issues is, ultimately, most valuable as a way to build students' experience in learning to learn.

Basic Skills:	listens actively, takes notes, uses analytic questioning, evaluates critically, supports the speaker, uses persuasion.
Thinking Skills:	acquires, evaluates and organizes information; generates "what if" scenarios to assess the impact of proposed courses of action.
Uses resources:	evaluates alternative information sources, reviews the value of personal resources, uses orally-communicated information, accesses information by telephone, uses on-line data resources, uses diverse print media as sources of information.
Interpersonal Skills:	collaborates, negotiates, works with diverse individuals and groups.
Uses Information:	uses multiple data sources, values clarification, reflection, hypothesis generation, hypothesis testing, hypothesis refinement; distinguishes fact and opinion

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Teaching Points

There are many models for analytic thinking and debate. The outline teaching points presented below has the advantage of providing a step-by-step process for thinking about an issue and then discussing it. It also seeks to build the student's skills as a listener which, then, can provide a model for being a more effective speaker. Instructors who want to address this set of skills in more depth may wish to review some of the resources listed in the Resources section of this module.

General

1. **It is okay to have an opinion, to differ with others, and to advocate for one's point of view.** Very little of the communication we have with each other is "neutral" exchange of facts. In fact, when ordinary people talk to each other, most of the time is spent either directly or indirectly expressing their opinion or viewpoint than communicating factual information. It is always all right, and often a good idea, to advocate for one's point of view. The guideline which people should adhere to is to clearly distinguish between expressing an opinion, a belief, and a fact. If individuals and groups do not speak out about their opinion on community or social issues, those concerns are seldom addressed.

2. **It is acceptable to differ about how important a social issue is.** There are many complex issues we face in contemporary society. Not surprisingly, with about 300 million residents, the range of issues important to people in the U.S. is very broad. People can and usually do differ about the importance of any issue. As in other realms, being respectful of differences is wise, but attempting to bring others around to one's own opinion is also legitimate.

3. **It is permitted to change your opinion.** Not only is it okay, it is inevitable. One's opinion should change when one learns more about an issue or when it turns out that what they believed to be a fact is not actually the case. When one does change an opinion, it is valuable to reflect on why and how the change process went. This prepares a person to better analyze their own way of thinking as part of getting more skilled in analyzing issues. It also can provide the foundation for better communication in the future.

4. **Staying calm and remaining polite is essential for communicating clearly.** No matter how extreme differences of opinion are, staying calm is essential to communicating clearly and persuading others to re-examine their facts or opinions and begin to seriously examine your facts or opinions. In almost all public and private forums, a person who speaks rudely or who loses emotional control is less effective than a person who remains calm. Feeling strongly is appropriate and strength of emotion is still part of

advocating for one's point of view but is most effective when a person is calm and polite.

5. **Everyone's viewpoint matters.** Everyone's perspective matters, not simply experts. Many people with little schooling feel that others know more than they do so they should remain silent and let those who know talk and decide. Surely we all should listen to what experts have to say but we also should remember that our own experience, our own unique way of looking at the world is important and makes a difference. Also, people can become experts -- sometimes very rapidly. For example, one of the institutions of local community affairs are the senior citizens, people who have taken the time to find out about even complex issues and hold the experts and local officials accountable for their recommendations, actions, and decisions.

Analyzing Issues and Opinions

6. **Clarify the issue or a speaker's perspective.** Active listening, that is, trying to organize what a speaker is saying in one's own mind (and asking relevant questions to clarify points which are not clear) is the first step. As a listener, one must remember to ask appropriate questions or give either positive feedback (e.g. praise, thanks) or negative feedback (criticism, requests for sources of disputed facts). Whether a person thinks they agree or disagree with a viewpoint it is a good idea to try to verify that they correctly understand what a speaker said. As a speaker, one of the best ways to make one's perspective clear to others is to anticipate the questions you would expect them to have.

7. **Find out more about the opinion or issue.** Check the facts. Consider what else might be relevant. Are there any questions that need to be answered to know with some confidence whether a viewpoint on a controversial issue is justified? Are there any aspects of the issue about which everyone agrees? How much information is there? How many different perspectives? Who might know more about the issue?

8. **Remember to consider the source or sources of an opinion or analysis of an issue.** Whose information is reliable (or more reliable)? Even informed and "authoritative" discussions of issues may not be "neutral". In fact, one of the points of discussing and debating an issue is to get different perspectives on it. Particularly important, both informally and formally in the political process, are the viewpoints of groups affected by a proposed policy, program, or government action. These affected groups or individuals are often referred to as "stakeholders". There may be several different stakeholders. For example, for a city zoning ordinance (e.g. about where restaurants can be located) stakeholders might include businesses in

the area, the city planning department which would implement the zoning, residents living in the area, and customers of affected businesses.

9. **On political proposals, determine who benefits and who loses.** Almost all contemporary social policy benefits some groups at the expense of some other groups. Commonly debated questions are the degree to which different groups benefit and the degree to which other groups are hurt by a proposition. Quite often, the political process may obscure the identity of the group which is proposing a new course of action to keep the public from recognizing that an apparently "neutral" proposal actually benefits the group which is proposing it.

10. **Determine how the opinion or proposal relates to your own views, interests, and objectives.** Part of analyzing an opinion or a proposed policy is to understand how it relates to other issues of importance to you personally. People who might not be interested in taxes on gas or oil might be interested if it affected the kind of education their children receive.

11. **Determine what you think is the best point of view, or best proposal, and why.** In many decisions on community issues, there is not one "right" or one "wrong" solution. Instead there are usually a number of different possible solutions. Often the final solution involves negotiations among different individuals or groups, each of whom thinks one proposal is (from their point of view) the "best" one. While we often refer to compromises in a negative way, they are an indispensable part of the process of agreeing on a common course of action to deal with community problems. Knowing why one believes in a particular solution to a problem is excellent preparation to argue in favor of one's point of view and, when necessary, consider what kinds of compromises make sense.

12. **Consider who might agree or disagree.** In analyzing community issues it is very important to consider who might agree or disagree with you. Democracy eventually involves numbers of people holding one opinion or another and in general the majority prevails. Discovering one's allies and opponents is not the first step but, at least, an eventual step toward being involved in addressing community problems. Allies or opponents can be family members, friends, neighbors, civic groups, newspaper or television reporters, staff of a public agency, elected officials, or local businesses.

Discussing Issues and Opinions

13. **Discuss the issue or proposal both with those with whom you agree and those with whom you disagree.** A basic concept in politics is the concept of the "swing vote", that is, representatives who will change their vote or persons who will change their point of view. Being effective in addressing community issues inevitably involves persuading people who do not initially agree with you. At the same time, sharing information, ideas, and concerns with friends, neighbors and allies can both help you analyze the issues better (as you may gain insight) and help others gain more insight.

14. **Do not burn bridges. Treat both allies and opponents properly.** There is seldom a good reason for insulting those with whom you disagree. At the very least, angry exchanges mean that people stop listening to each other. At the worst, conflict escalates, sometimes into violence. People's opinions change. In community life, old alliances break up. New alliances are formed. Dialogue instead of confrontation, debate instead of insult, are necessary because, in most communities, people need to keep on living with each other and whenever one set of problems is resolved (successfully or unsuccessfully), a new set will appear.

Sample Learning Activities

This module can be used in abbreviated form as a basis for structuring one unit or, alternatively, as the foundation for a workshop or course focusing primarily or exclusively on addressing community issues, in conjunction with Module 19 -- Collaborating with Neighbors.

Activities in this module can be particularly helpful in building students' self esteem and recognition that they too, can have a voice in their community. This experience can increase their motivation and willingness to invest time in acquiring new, accurate information, taking the trouble to interpret it, talk about it with others.

1. Assign one or several of the topics on the resource sheet **Topics for Discussion and Debate** sheet to groups of students to analyze and discuss. Treat this as a project -- asking students to go through the steps they have been learning about, including gathering their own information. You may want to assign half of the students to each side of the debate or, alternatively, allow them to choose sides.

2. Review front section headlines about issues from a week of newspapers with the class and have them vote on which three are most controversial and which are most important to their lives. You may want to then assign these topics as analysis and debate projects as in activity #1. The resource sheet, **A Week of Local Issues**, may be helpful.

3. Explore three online "chat" forums on the Internet with students. Invite any interested students to participate.

4. Use three different World-Wide Web search engines to find information on one of the topics chosen in Learning Activity 1 or 2. Explore what happens with broader and narrower searches.

5. Assign a group of students to each local radio talk show. Have the members of each group listen to the talk show for one hour (you might want to assign different time slots to different people in each group). Have the talk show listening groups report back to the class about:
   a) the topics which came up,
   b) how informed people who called in seemed to be,
   c) how informed the talk show host seemed to be.

   (If there is a local public radio station with a talk show, you should be sure to include it as a "baseline" for relatively objective thoughtful discussion.)

6. Invite speakers from opposing sides of a local controversy to the class. Ask the class to prepare by researching the issue and formulating three sets of questions -- ones which are "neutral", ones which favor the pro- group, ones which favor the anti- group.

7. Review the propositions in a California Voter's pamphlet with students. They include versions of the propositions in other languages. Discuss the rationale for the pamphlet including a "neutral" discussion by the Legislative Analyst, a "pro" argument and a "con" argument, in addition to the text of the proposition. Discuss what people know about the objectives and mission of the pro and con groups.

Extension Activities:

Instructors may wish to extend this module which is focused on developing skills needed to participate meaningfully in community dialogue on local problems and issues to other important domains of students' lives. The skills used in debating community issues relate directly to dialogue within a household, an extended family, and in a workplace about issues where there may be deep divisions of opinion.

Instructors may also wish to divide this module into two separate clusters of learning activities. One cluster might focus on the many social, economic, and community issues relating to immigrant policies. The other might focus on "general" community issues which are shared in common by immigrants and citizens and cut across boundaries.

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Resources

1. Resource Sheet -- **Prioritizing A Week of Local Issues**

2. Resource Sheet -- **"Hot Button" Topics for Discussion and Debate**

3. Susan B. Tucker, Linda Kern, and Peter Neville, **"Revisioning ESL for a Multicultural Society: Educating Newcomers to Challenge Racism and Respect Differences"**, Draft Report to the Ford Foundation, Division of Immigration and Homeless Services, Victim Services, January, 1996. [This paper focuses on issues related to racism and prejudice. It provides interested teachers a thought-provoking discussion of many of the more general issues related to pluralism].

4. Robert Bach et al, **Executive Summary: The Changing Relations Project**, The Ford Foundation, 1994. [This is a major report, the result of almost a decade of research on tensions between immigrants and U.S.-born populations in case study communities, including one in California. The report is succinct, easy to read, and presents recommendations which have important implications for adult education instructors' roles.]

5. Advisory Panel on School Violence, Commission on Teacher Credentialing, State of California, **Creating Caring Relationships to Foster Academic Excellence: Recommendations for Reducing Violence in California Schools**, Final Report, October, 1995. [This report provides an excellent example of a systematic approach to analyzing an important community problem and making recommendations about the roles of different groups -- administrators, teachers, parents, and the police.]

6. **Hacia la Realizacion de la Autoestima, Informe Definitivo del Comité Estatal en Pro de la Autoestima y de la Responsibilidad Personal y Social**, California Department of Education, 1992. [This report focuses on the personal issues related to community involvement and provides a valuable complement to the analytic focus of this module].

7. Elsa Roberts Auerbach, **Making Meaning, Making Change: Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL Literacy**, ERIC/Center for Applied Linguistics, 1992. [Although this book includes much research-oriented information, it provides a valuable guide for instructors who want to configure their instruction, and the topics addressed in this particular module to the concerns of their local community].

8. The **"LatinoWeb homepage"** which maintains links to a wide range of Latin American and U.S. Hispanic newspapers is an interesting Internet resource for instructors working to engage students in local issues. The address is: http://www.latinoweb.com/favision/

9. **"Latino U.S.A."** is an English-language news and public affairs service on National Public Radio produced by the University of Texas which covers issue of particular interest to Latinos. Latino U.S.A. also maintains a homepage on the Internet which welcomes comments and dialogue with listeners. The homepage address is: lusa@www.utexas.edu

10. **"Noticiero Latino"**, produced by Radio Bilingüe in Fresno, California, is a Spanish-language news and public affairs service which covers an even broader range of domestic and Latin American issues. It is distributed via satellite to bilingual public radio stations throughout the United States.

ESL Commercial Textbooks

Can We Talk?, Prentice Hall
Ch. 3, Free Time, Comparing, Giving Reasons

Can't Stop Talking, Heinle & Heinle
Various Chapters

Expressways 2, Prentice Hall
Ch. 8, Strategies For Communicating

Job Survival Skills, Educational Designs
Ch. 7, Communication

Keep Talking, Cambridge University Press
Ch. 3, Discussions and Decisions

18. ANALYZING & DEBATING COMMUNITY ISSUES

OBJECTIVES:

- evaluate information sources;
- distinguish fact and opinion;
- collaborate and negotiate;
- debate issues.

LEARNERS & CONTEXT

Adult students. Average ability of the group is medium. The range of ability is wide. Motivation is high. Group size is between 11 and 30. There are many learners whose English is limited.

ROOM SETUP

Small tables and chairs to allow team work activities and to set up a head table for debate.

TO BRING

Local newspapers.

TO DO AHEAD

Collect copies of local paper for at least a week.
Prepare large "YES" and "NO" signs. Hang or paste in different corners of classroom.
Reserve internet time for students.
Recruit school personnel who might be available for interviewing.

MEDIA USED

Overhead, "YES" and "NO" signs, print.

STEPS

Warm Up
Presentation
"Hot Button" topics
Reading - Selecting a Topic
Research Information - Analyze
Debate the topic
Evaluate
Break
Review Newspapers - Prioritize ideas
Research and Analyze
Debate and Vote
Review
Reflect
Homework
Closure

Holda Dorsey

Lesson Plan: 18. Analyzing & Debating Issues

	Warm up	Teacher states that in the U.S. it is important the become informed about community issues and to be aware of what their neighbors, friends, local officials, local businesses, and elected representatives may be thinking or doing about these issues.
(5 min)	*Motivation* *• Establish Future Relevance*	
	Presentation	Teacher shows the objectives on the overhead and explains that through this lesson students will be able to: Evaluate information sources; Distinguish fact and opinion; Collaborate and negotiate; and Debate issues. And students will also practice: Working in teams; Locating, analyzing, and using resources; Researching online.
(10 min)	*Information Preview* *• Show Final Goal*	
	overhead	
	"Hot Button" topics	Teacher shows students a large "YES" sign pasted in a corner of the room, and a large "NO" sign pasted in the opposite corner.
(15 min)	*Motivation* *• Establish Tie to Interests*	Teacher asks students to stand up in the center of the room. Teacher will read a statement and without discussion students will walk to the "yes" or "no" corners based on their opinion.
	"YES" & "NO" signs	Teacher reads the first "Hot Button" topic and gives students the opportunity to move to the "YES" or "NO" corners. Teacher reminds students that there is no discussion permitted yet. Teacher reads the next "Hot Button" topic, etc.
	Talk about it	Teacher allows the students to express their ideas regarding the exercise.
(5 min)	*Information Acquisition* *• Discussion*	

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Lesson Plan: 18. Analyzing & Debating Issues

	Reading	Teacher informs the students that they are going to read about the steps for analyzing information before discussing or debating.
(15 min)	*Practice & Feedback* *• Reading Aloud*	Teacher hands out the "Reading" and calls on students at random to read aloud.
	print	After each point teacher asks students to clarify what they read or to give examples.
	Select a topic	Teacher show the "Hot Button" topics on the overhead and asks students to select one topic to research, analyze and debate.
(10 min)	*Motivation* *• Establish Tie to Interests*	Students negotiate among themselves until they choose a topic relevant to the majority.
	overhead	
	Research information	Teacher divides the class in two teams. "Pro" team and ""Con" team.
(20 min)	*Practice & Feedback* *• Creative Practice*	The teams are to research "pro" or "con" information on the selected topic.
	mixture	Students may review newspapers, call and interview friends, relatives, politicians. Log on Internet and look for information on the topic.
		Students may interview school personnel about their opinions and the reasons.
	Analyze	Teacher asks the two groups to review the information gathered and analyze whether it is fact or opinion.
(10 min)	*Practice & Feedback* *• Group Practice - Indep.*	Groups can work on presentation strategy, selecting a spokesperson, etc.
	Debate the topic	Teacher asks the two groups to sit facing each other. Teacher inquires if the group will have a spokeperson or if the members will take turns speaking. Teacher informs the groups that each group will have three minutes to present their side of the issue. Then they will have two minutes to refute statements from the other side; and two final minutes for closing comments.
(20 min)	*Practice & Feedback* *• Role Play*	Students debate the issue with the teacher acting as moderator during the discussion.

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Lesson Plan: 18. Analyzing & Debating Issues

	Evaluate	Teacher asks students to comment on what they observed or heard during the debate.
(10 min)	*Practice & Feedback* • *Debriefing*	Teacher records comments on the board.
	blackboard	Teacher guides the students to formulate constructive criticism.
	Break	Students may take a few minutes to stretch, walk around, change seating arrangements.
(10 min)	*Other* • *Break*	Teacher completes attendance records and other necessary paperwork.
	Review newspapers	Teacher askls students to review local newspapers for the week and select community, state or federal issues of interest.
(10 min)	*Information Acquisition* • *Inquiry - Group*	Students may work individually or as a team accessing information.
	newspapers	
	Prioritize	Teacher asks students to work in groups of four.
(15 min)	*Practice & Feedback* • *Group Practice - Indep.*	The task is to prioritize the list of issues. Students will have to negotiate with their group. When each group has set their priorities, then they can negotiate to set the class priorities.
	print	

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Lesson Plan: 18. Analyzing & Debating Issues

Research and analyze

(15 min)

Practice & Feedback
- *Creative Practice*

mixture

Students break up in two teams. "Pro" team and ""Con" team.

The teams research "pro" or "con" information on the selected topic.

Teacher monitors students and assists as needed.

Students review newspapers, call and interview friends, relatives, school personnel, politicians. Log on Internet and look for information on the topic.

Students analyze data gathered and separate opinions from facts. Students select a spoke person.

Debate and vote

(20 min)

Practice & Feedback
- *Role Play*

Teacher asks the two speakers to come to the front of the classroom. Again the teacher sets the ground rules for the debate and tells the rest of the class to listen carefully because they are going to vote based on the presentations.

The speakers debate the issue.

Other students listen and take notes.

When the speakers are finished, the teacher asks students to go to the "YES" or "NO" corner based on what they heard.

Review

(10 min)

Practice & Feedback
- *Debriefing*

After the activity, the teacher asks the students what they learned, how it was presented, whether anyone changed their opinion after listening to the debate.

Students provide constructive criticism as well as perceptions of the activity.

Reflection

(10 min)

Closure
- *Reflection*

other

Teacher asks students to quietly think of what they have practiced and to write in their journals why it is important to research, analyze and become active in community issues and what personal issues need to be addressed.

Students may share some of their comments.

Lesson Plan: 18. Analyzing & Debating Issues

	Homework	Teacher gives to the students a list of Internet sites that present Latino issues.
(10 min)	*Other* *• Assign Homework*	Students are to locate these sites, write their URL (address) and a brief line about them.
	print	Students may add other sites of interest that they locate. The assignment is to be turned in the following week.

	Closure	Teacher reviews the objectives of the lesson: You are able to: Evaluate information sources; Distinguish fact and opinion; Collaborate and negotiate; Debate issues. And students also practiced: Working in teams; Locating, analyzing, and using resources; Researching online.
(10 min)	*Closure* *• Instructor Summary*	
	overhead	Students may comment on the highlights.

OBJECTIVES

You will be able to:

- **Evaluate information resources;**
- **Distinguish fact and opinion;**
- **Collaborate and negotiate;**
- **Debate issues.**

You will also practice:

* **Working in teams;**
* **Locating, analyzing and using resources;**
* **Researching online.**

Analyzing and Debating Issues

It is important to participate in the community affairs, specially when they affect the way we live. To become active you need to take the time to study the facts, to listen carefully to the different opinions of other people and weigh the consequences of a decision. Here are some ideas to follow.

1. **It is all right to have an opinion, to differ with others, and to advocate for one's point of view.** Very little of the communication we have with each other is neutral exchange of facts. In fact, when people talk to each other, most of the time is spent either directly or indirectly expressing their opinion or viewpoint than in communicating factual information. The guideline which people should follow to is to clearly distinguish between expressing an opinion, a belief, and a fact. Practically, if individuals and groups do not speak out about their opinion on community or social issues, their concerns are seldom considered.

2. **It is allowable to differ about how important a social issue is.** In contemporary society we face many complex issues. The range of issues important to people in the U.S. is very broad. People usually differ about the importance of any issue. As in other areas, being respectful of differences is wise, but attempting to bring others around to one's own opinion is also legitimate.

3. **It is okay to change your opinion.** Not only is it all right, it is inevitable. One's opinion <u>should</u> change when one learns more about an issue or when it turns out that what one believed to be a fact is not actually the case. When one does change an opinion, it is valuable to reflect on why and how the change process went. This prepares a person to better analyze their own way of thinking as part of getting more skilled in analyzing issues. It also can provide the foundation for better communication in the future.

4. **Staying calm and remaining polite is essential for communicating clearly.** No matter how extreme are the differences of opinion, staying calm is essential to communicating clearly, and for persuading others to re-examine their facts or opinions, and to seriously examine your facts or opinions. In almost all public and private forums, a person who speaks rudely or who loses emotional control is less effective than a person who remains calm. Feeling strongly is appropriate and strength of emotion is still part of advocating for one's point of view, but it is most effective when a person is calm and polite.

5. **Everyone's viewpoint matters.** Everyone's perspective matters, not simply the experts' viewpoint. Many people with little schooling feel that others know more than they do so they should remain silent and let those who know talk and decide. We all should listen to what experts have to say. We also should remember that our own experiences shape our opinions, and these opinions are important and make a difference. Also, people can become experts -- sometimes very rapidly.

6. **Clarify the issue or a speaker's perspective.** Active listening, that is, trying to organize what a speaker is saying in one's own mind, and asking relevant questions to clarify points which are not clear are the first steps. As a listener, one must remember to ask appropriate questions or to give either positive feedback (e.g. praise, thanks) or negative feedback (criticism, requests for sources of disputed facts). Whether a person thinks they agree or disagree with a viewpoint, it is a good idea to try to verify that they correctly understand what a speaker said. As a speaker, one of the best ways to make one's own perspective clear to others is to anticipate the questions you would expect the audience to have.

7. **Find out more about the opinion or issue.** Check the facts. Consider what else might be relevant. Are there any questions that need to be answered to know with some confidence whether a viewpoint on a controversial issue is justified? Are there any aspects of the issue about which everyone agrees? How much information is there? How many different perspectives? Who might know more about the issue?

8. **Remember to consider the source or sources of an opinion or exposition of an issue.** Whose information is reliable or more reliable? Even informed discussions of issues may not be neutral. In fact, one of the points of discussing and debating an issue is to get different perspectives about it. Particularly important, both informally and formally in the political process, are the viewpoints of groups affected by a proposed policy, program, or government action. These affected groups or individuals are often referred to as "stakeholders". There may be several different stakeholders. For example, for a city zoning ordinance about where restaurants can be located, stakeholders might include businesses in the area, the city planning department which would implement the zoning, residents living in the area, and customers of affected businesses. Do you think that they will all have the same opinions?

9. **On political proposals, determine who benefits and who loses.** Almost all contemporary social policy benefits some groups at the expense of some other groups. Commonly debated questions are the degree to which different groups benefit and the degree to which other groups are hurt by a proposition. Quite often, the political process may obscure the identity of the group which is proposing a new course of action to keep the public from recognizing that an apparently neutral proposal actually benefits the group proposing it.

10. **Determine how the opinion or proposal relates to your own views, interests, and objectives.** Part of analyzing an opinion or a proposed policy is to understand how it relates to other issues of importance to you personally. People who might not be interested in taxes on gas or oil might be interested if it affected the kind of education their children get.

11. **Determine what you think is the best point of view, or best proposal, and why.** In many decisions on community issues, there is not one right or one wrong solution. Instead there are usually a number of different possible solutions. Often the final solution involves negotiations among different individuals or groups, each of whom thinks one proposal is (from their point of view) the best one. While we often refer to compromises in a negative way, they are an indispensable part of the process of agreeing on a common course of action to deal with community problems. Knowing why one believes in a particular solution to a problem is excellent preparation to argue in favor of one's point of view and, when necessary, consider what kinds of compromises make sense.

12. **Consider who might agree or disagree.** In analyzing community issues it is very important to consider who might agree or disagree with you. Democracy eventually involves numbers of people holding one opinion or another and in general the majority prevails. Discovering one's allies and opponents is an eventual step toward being involved in addressing community problems. Allies or opponents can be family members, friends, neighbors, civic groups, newspaper or television reporters, staff of a public agency, elected officials, or local businesses.

13. **Discuss the issue or proposal both with those with whom you agree and those with whom you disagree.** A basic concept in politics is the concept of the "swing vote", that is, representatives who will change their vote or persons who will change their point of view. Being effective in addressing community issues inevitably involves persuading people who do not initially agree with you. At the same time, sharing information, ideas, and concerns with friends, neighbors and allies can both help you analyze the issues better, express them clearly, and help others gain more insight.

14. **Do not burn bridges. Treat both allies and opponents properly.** There is seldom a good reason for insulting those with whom you disagree. At the very least, angry exchanges mean that people stop listening to each other. At the worst, conflict escalates, sometimes into violence. People's opinions change. In community life, old alliances break up. New alliances are formed. Dialogue instead of confrontation, debate instead of insult, are necessary because, in most communities, people need to keep on living with each other and whenever one set of problems is resolved, a new set will appear.

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"Hot Button" Topics for Discussion and Debate

The following list of topics includes a fairly wide range of contemporary social policy issues which are currently being debated vigorously. Most cut across political alignments. Some are immediately relevant to immigrants' lives.

1. Should it be legal for volunteer groups or health clinics to provide drug users with clean needles to prevent the spread of AIDS?

2. Should parents receive vouchers from the state for their children's education?

3. Should California cities be required to close down rental housing which is in sub-standard condition?

4. Should there be a two-year limit on the length of time that a mother can receive welfare to raise children?

5. What should the tradeoffs be between government spending on building prisons and supporting schools, given general agreement that:
   a) California prisons are too crowded, and
   b) California schools need to be improved?

6. Should there be a set number of geographical districts in California communities, each of which, elects one representative (e.g. five districts, one representative from each) or should there just be one district where the top vote-getters win (e.g. on most school boards the top vote-getters win)?

7. Should commuters using the Bay Bridge in San Francisco pay to have it repaired to be safe in earthquakes or should the state of California repair the bridge, using general fund money which taxpayers all over the state contributed?

8. Should people be U.S. citizens to vote on local issues?

9. Should everyone pay the same share of their income in income tax (i.e. a flat tax) or should people who earn more pay a higher percent of their income (i.e. the current "progressive" income tax)?

10. Should the U.S.-born children of immigrants who are not legally in the U.S. be considered citizens or not?

Prioritizing A Week of Local Issues

Use the matrix below in choosing and scoring potential issues for discussion and debate. Have the class vote to assign a priority to each particular issue. Tally the votes in each row to rank the issues.

ISSUE	Very important issue (7 points)	Fairly important but not as important as others (4 points)	Not very important (1 point)	TOTAL SCORE
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				

What is the (URL) Address?

Student: Find the following places, write their Internet address and a sentence describing what they are about.

1. Latino Announcements http://www._____

_____

2. Latino Literature http://www._____

_____

3. MCLR Goals http://www._____

_____

4. Latino Telaraña http://www._____

_____

5. Chicano-Latino Studies http://www._____

_____

6. Latino Connection http://www._____

_____

7. Office of Latino Outreach http://www._____

_____

8. Latino Link http://www._____

_____

9. Latino Leaders http://www._____

_____

10. The Electric Mercado http://www._____

_____

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Date: _____

Student Name _____

Teacher Name _____

Student Survey
Analyzing and Debating Issues

1. Have you ever thought about or discussed the following ideas with friends, family members or co-workers?

	For Each Line, Please check the box that applies to you			
	Never	Once or Twice	Quite Often	Not Interested
a. That it is an important skill to be able to formulate a sound opinion on an issue?				
b. That your opinion about an issue is valid and important even if you are not considered an "expert"?				
c. That it is often difficult to allow people, including friends and family members, to express their opinions when they disagree with you?				
d. That a fact is different from an opinion or a belief?				
e. That it is wise to expect that people will disagree about important social issues and what should be done about them, especially the most urgent ones.				
f. That people have to live together even when they don't agree on all issues?				
g. That every policy (public policy or business policy) benefits some people more than others?				
h. That every public or business policy can and should be looked at carefully and critically?				

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2. Please read the information provided below and write your opinion of the situation:

Background: A big fast food restaurant has just decided to change the company who provides them with meat—the meat supplier— because some of the meat the company delivered was contaminated. The supplier has asked the restaurant to delay its decision. If the decision is not delayed, the supplier will be forced into bankruptcy and all its workers will lose their jobs. To help convince the restaurant to do this, the supplier has agreed to take back all the meat and, before any future meat is shipped to the restaurant, to test it to make sure it is not contaminated. The big fast food organization has asked you for help with making its' decision.

a. What do you think they should do?

_____

_____

b. Why? Please make an argument for your position including at least 3 points

•

_____

_____

•

_____

_____

•

_____

_____

LAES

3. **Are you confident you have the skills you need in order to be able to:**

	For Each Line, Please check the box that applies to you			
	Not Very Confident	A Little Confident	Quite Confident	Have all the Information I need
a. Determine what the issues are, in your community or in the US in general, which most affect your family and community?				
b. Discuss with your neighbors and fellow workers which issues they feel are most important?				
c. Assess what impact a belief, policy decision or business practice might have on your life and on the life of your community?				
d. Actively support people who feel as you do about an issue?				
e. Listen carefully and respectfully to the point of view of someone who does not agree with you?				
f. Check whether or not you have really heard what your opponent is saying?				
g. Take note of the strong points of those who disagree with you?				
h. Talk about why you disagree with someone, with the object of persuading people who don't agree with you that yours is the better position?				
i. Communicate positively with people with whom you strongly disagree?				
j. Gather relevant facts which support your point of view?				

LAES

4. Are you confident you know all you need to about the information resources available to you if you want to:

	For Each Line, Please check the box that applies to you			
	Not Very Confident	A Little Confident	Quite Confident	Have All the Information I need
a. Use a variety of different information sources to assess and refute the arguments of your opponents?				
b. Find out who is backing an issue or promoting a business or public policy change?				
c. Determine if media information about an issue is biased?				
d. Research the relevant facts surrounding an issue?				
e. Find and communicate with others who agree with your point of view?				
f. Use computer data resources, or the worldwide web, to research an issue?				

5. What do you want to learn about analyzing and debating issues?

I want to learn:
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

LAES

Date: _____

Student Name _____

Teacher Name _____

Module 18
Analyzing and Debating Issues

Instructions
Please join with three or four other students to work on this activity as a group. The activity is divided in two parts. The first part asks you to discuss two issues which have been in news recently. The second part asks you to reflect on your work with this module and tell us what you have learned.

Part I. Students should work in pairs or in small groups.

1. Share with your partner or other group members what you already know about the following two social issues: (a) the use of methyl bromide, or (b) bilingual education. If the class has Internet access and the Instructor approves, you might want to look for more information on the Internet.

2. Decide with your partner which issue to focus on-- methyl bromide or bilingual education. Then read the appropriate selection

- The reading on methyl bromide comes from the April 1996 issue of the Sonoma County Environmental Impact Reporter. The article was written by Patty Clary. It has been simplified and shortened.

- The article about bilingual education comes from The National Association for Bilingual Education report called "Bilingual Education: Separating Fact from Fiction." It was published September 18, 1995 and written by Richard V. López. It too has been shortened.

3. Decide what opinion you and your partner or group have about this issue. In deciding, be sure to pay attention to whether the point of view in the article is objective or whether it favors one side of a an issue. The choices are, for:

Methyl Bromide
- ❑a. Ban the use of methyl bromide
- ❑b. Continue the use of methyl bromide

Bilingual Education
- ❑a. Favor bilingual education
- ❑b. Opposed to bilingual education

4. On the answer sheet provided, list:
   a. your group's position,
   b. the reasons for that position,
   c. two reasons people with the opposite opinion might have.

5. Write a letter or make an oral presentation defending your position. If you make an oral presentation, we would like you to write down the key points of your presentation, and hand them into the teacher.

To defend your position well, express sound and clear reasons for your opinion, be persuasive in your writing, anticipate objections to your opinion and address them, indicate consequences of actions both in favor of and against the opinions you hold.

Part II.

Please tell us what you learned from your work with this module

1. Did you benefit from your work on this module regarding any of the following?

understanding better how to:	Yes/No	Please comment on either: • How you benefited; or • Why you feel this module was not useful for you in this area
a. Determine what the issues are, in your community or in the US in general, which most affect your family and community?		
b. Discuss with your neighbors and fellow workers which issues they feel are most important?		
c. Assess what impact a belief, policy decision or business practice might have on your life and on the life of your community?		
d. Use a variety of different information and data sources to assess and refute the arguments of your opponents?		
e. Find out who is backing an issue or promoting a business or public policy change?		
f. Determine if information about an issue, from media or other sources, is biased?		

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2. **Did your work in this module help you in any of the following areas?**

	Yes/No	Please comment on either: • How you benefited; or • Why you feel this module was not useful for you in this area
a. Read written materials (from newspaper or other sources) to understand key aspects of an issue or formulate your position.		
b. Listen carefully and respectfully to the point of view of someone who does not agree with you; and check whether or not you have really understood what he or she is saying?		
c. Take note of the strong points of those who disagree with you?		
d. Talk about why you disagree with someone, with the object of persuading people who don't agree with you that yours is the better position?		
e. Gather relevant facts which support your point of view?		
f. Research the relevant facts surrounding an issue?		
g. Use computer data resources to research an issue?		
h. Anything else? Please tell us about it below		

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Answer Sheet for Module 18: Analyzing and Debating Issues

Social Issue Chosen_____

Opinion _____

Reasons for opinion

1. _____
_____

2. _____
_____

3. _____
_____

4. _____
_____

Possible Reasons for Opposite Opinion

1. _____
_____

2. _____
_____

3. _____
_____

Letter or Presentation Notes:

LAES

Reading
Methyl Bromide Marches On
by Patty Clary, 1996

Ignoring pleas of environmentalists and farm workers from throughout his district, Northcoast Senator Mike Thompson joined other state senators to approve a bill mid-February that saves farmers from a ban of the highly toxic and ozone-depleting pesticide methyl bromide. The Assembly later passed the bill and it was signed into law by Governor Pete Wilson in early March.

The senate rejected amendments proposed by Senator Nicholas Petris to provide protections for public health while the chemical continues to be used in fields, buildings and export facilities around the state.

Methyl bromide, which is used at flower farms, plant nurseries and in wine grape fields on the Northcoast, was due to be banned in late March because its manufacturer has not yet finished research on laboratory animals required under the Birth Defects Prevention Act. First passed in 1984, the Act required studies of the birth defect effects on laboratory animals of 200 pesticides. The deadline for information on several chemicals was extended in 1991 to March 1996, and manufacturers of methyl bromide needed yet another extension to finish studies by the end of 1997.

Senator Diane Watson, chair of the Senate Health Committee where the bill's fate depended on Thompson's swing vote, revealed that her sources had found at least one study which had shown methyl bromide to be a significant birth defect agent. Unconfirmed rumors abounded that the chemical was difficult to study because animals would die from its effects before results were in on whether the chemical could harm developing fetuses.

Research completed in Great Britain three years ago indicated structural deformities of rabbit fetuses caused by material exposure to methyl bromide. Based on this study, the U.S. EPA began requiring labels for methyl bromide fumigation of structures to indicate the possibility of birth defects. California regulators decided to require that people remain out of building for longer periods of time after methyl bromide fumigation shortly after a California man died when he re-entered his home following a legal fumigation.

The state also studied field fumigation with methyl bromide and learned it can drift several miles offsite during inversions and other weather conditions frequently experienced on the coast. Most of the nineteen million pounds of methyl bromide used in California each year are used in coastal counties.

Methyl bromide is categorized as an extremely acute toxic by the US. EPA because it will kill anyone unfortunate enough to breathe it at high quantities. It

killed fifteen people who illegally entered houses during tenting and fumigation between 1980 and 1992. It also injures, sometimes permanently, especially farm workers. Methyl bromide primarily attacks the central nervous system, causing dizziness, trembling, respiratory difficulties, intoxication-like symptoms and permanent loss of sensation and motor skills.

Methyl bromide is also a significant destroyer of the earth's protective ozone layer, causing at least 10 to 15% of current ozone depletion.

The main use of methyl bromide is to kill soil pests prior to planting crops. It is especially used on the strawberry crop. It is also used post harvest on crops for storage or export. Methyl bromide is used to fumigate buildings to kill wood eating insects.

Farmers have not been required to warn surrounding communities in advance of field fumigation, in spite of studies showing its ability to cause birth defects and research showing it can drift up to several miles at "excessive rates."

School teachers, farm laborers, environmentalists and health care providers from around the state called for the end of the use of methyl bromide during two months of fierce debate leading up to the Senate vote. Intense media coverage and numerous editorials, letters and phone calls put more of a spotlight on legislators who supported the bill than any had anticipated.

Environmentalists called on senators to at least pass amendments to provide buffer zones for schools, hospitals and playgrounds and give ample notification to people living, working, attending school or in hospitals near fumigation. The senators, however, were unwilling to provide even the minimal protections.

Meanwhile, in Washington D.C. the Clinton Administration began drafting legislation to change the Clean Air Act to allow continued production of methyl bromide past the federally mandated phase-out date in 2001. Legislation is being written to weaken ozone depletion provisions of the clean air law.

Environmentalists say that the move to change and weaken the Clean Air Act in regards to methyl bromide appears to be an election year trick since agriculture in key electoral states Florida and California accounts for most U.S. methyl bromide use.

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Reading
Bilingual Education: Separating Fact from Fiction
September 18, 1995
Richard V. López

Bilingual Education: Separating Fact from Fiction is a short report that helps policy makers, the media, and the public better understand bilingual education. It draws on current government data and scholarly, independent research to identify what is fact and fiction in a discussion of the education on limited-English proficient students. (LEP students)

Fiction: *"Studies prove that bilingual education doesn't work."*
Fact: There is agreement in the research community both on the soundness of the theory and effectiveness of bilingual education. In 1990, the Department of Education asked the NAS to review two studies, covering thousands of Spanish-speaking limited-English proficient (LEP) students. The NAS is the National Academy of Sciences and is the most prestigious research body in the world. The NAS has researchers and social scientists recognized as the best in their fields. The NAS review of the studies affirmed the finding that LEP students in bilingual education programs made greater academic gains in content areas, like math, than the students who received all instruction in English.

Fiction: *"Language-minority parents and communities oppose bilingual education."*
Fact: Polls show that language-minority communities solidly support bilingual education. For example, more than 80% of the Latinos interviewed back bilingual education, according to a poll by the Los Angeles Times.

Fiction: *"Studies confirm what common sense would tell you: the less time you spend speaking a new language, the more slowly you'll learn it."*
Fact: The studies validated by the NAS directly addressed and refuted this claim. "The study concluded that providing LEP students with substantial instruction in their primary language does not interfere with or delay their acquisition of English language skills, but helps them to "catch up" to their English-speaking peers in English language arts, English reading, and math. In contrast, providing LEP students with almost exclusive instruction in English does not accelerate their acquisition of English language arts, reading or math., i.e., they do not appear to be "catching up." To use an example from Washington, D.C., Public Schools, students at the Oyster Bilingual Elementary School - where the students are about half native English and native Spanish speakers - students are taught half the time in English and half the time in Spanish. Sixth grade students at the school scored the equivalent to twelfth grade students in English language art on the California Test of Basic Skills. In other words, sixth grade bilingual education students were not only performing at the level of high school seniors in English, they were also fully literate in Spanish.

Fiction: *"Many 'bilingual' programs use the student's native language almost exclusively in the first few years. Students aren't learning English."*

Fact: This claim is refuted by the studies validated by the NAS. The studies found that English was used the majority of time in bilingual education programs and by the fourth grade only 3 % of instruction was in the student's native language. Specifically, the studies found that in transitional bilingual education classrooms, English was used 65.8% of the time, in Kindergarten, 69.1% in Grade 1, 74.5% in Grade 2, 80.3% in Grade 3, and 97.3% in Grade 4. Even in developmental bilingual programs, where the goal is fluency in both languages, English was used a majority of the time in Grades 3-6. Every bilingual education program includes significant coursework in teaching English language skills.

Fiction: *"My grandparents were immigrants and made it without bilingual education or any other special help."*

Fact: Contrary to the myth that earlier immigrant groups managed without special programs, most immigrant children who entered schools were more likely to sink than swim in English-only classrooms. In 1908, for example, just 13% of the twelve-year-olds enrolled in New York public schools, and whose parents were foreign-born, went on the high school, compared with 32% of white children whose parents were native born. Today's high-skills, high-technology labor market makes it even more difficult to succeed in the American job market without education.